

**Thanksgiving and Prayer to God:
A Sermon on Nehemiah 11:17
by Scottish Baptist Preacher,
Peter Grant *of the Songs***

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Introduction

Though I teach New Testament I also have a passion for preaching and a lifelong love of history. Because of the latter affections I have transcribed and edited numerous sermons of the Scottish Baptist, Peter Grant *of the Songs*, a hymn-writer,¹ pastor and preacher in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland for about sixty years.² The sermon brief you will read below is one of these transcribed sermons.

In January 2001 I was on a mission trip in Grantown-on-Spey, Scotland, with some students from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. At that time, we met with Mark Baker, then pastor of the Grantown Baptist Church, where Peter Grant used to be pastor. Mark introduced me to Margaret Cumming, one of Grant's descendants. She had in her possession the only extant sermon manuscripts of her ancestor. I mentioned to her that the sermons had research value and that someone should transcribe, edit, and publish them. To my delight, she graciously entrusted them to my care for a period of time so that they could be transcribed and published to enable others to learn more of Grant and his preaching.

Grant was born in Ballintua, Strathspey, Scotland in 1783 and died in 1867. He had a considerable ministry, as Donald E. Meek, Professor of Celtic Studies at the University of Edinburgh, shows in the following description of Grant's life.

Baptist pastor and celebrated Gaelic evangelical poet. Born of small-farming stock, Grant became the precentor in the local parish church

¹ Grant was known as Peter Grant *of the Songs*, no doubt because of his popularity as a songwriter.

² These sermons will appear in a book titled, *The Highland Herald: Sermons of Scottish Baptist Preacher, Peter Grant of the Songs* (Joshua Press).

when the Haldane movement was beginning to affect certain parts of the Highlands. He was later converted under the preaching of Lachlan Mackintosh, the founder and first pastor of the Baptist church at Grantown-on-Spey. He then became an itinerant missionary. When Mackintosh left Grantown in 1826, Grant succeeded him as pastor of the church, and was formally ordained in 1829. He possessed considerable evangelistic gifts. Under his ministry and that of his son, William, the church achieved a membership of almost 300, and experienced intermittent revivals.

Grant's hymns owe some themes to Dugald Buchanan, but are noticeably different in style and content. Their main focus is the "pilgrim's progress" in the life of faith. The Christian pilgrimage is followed from conversion until the believer's arrival in heaven. Grant extols the efficacy of Christ's blood, emphasises the inevitability of death, and anticipates the joy of the eternal home. The world is depicted as a cold place, a vale of tears; the Christian Hope compensates for the sorrow of believer's parting with loved ones. The experiential emphasis is reminiscent of Methodist hymnology. Set to well-known tunes, Grant's compositions became extremely popular in the Highlands, and helped establish an enduring trend in Gaelic hymnology.³

Grant was a faithful man of God. My prayer is that the publication of his sermons will lead to more people knowing about his life and ministry and in some way contribute to revival amongst present-day Scottish Baptists.

Sermon

"Thanksgiving and Prayer to God"

3 December 1851
Thanksgiving Day, Afternoon

Mr. Grant
Nehemiah 11:17

And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, *was* the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun (KJV).

The Jews were so guilty of idolatry that nothing but captivity could cure. But it did cure it most effectually. Nehemiah was among the children of the captivity. He was cupbearer at Jerusalem which was no small or low office. But he was raised up by God to be so in favor with the king as to get his request. The opening he gave to the temple after the captivity was

³ Donald E. Meek, "Grant, Peter" in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730-1860*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), I: 467.

thanksgiving and prayer. And they could praise the Lord for the great deliverance they got.

1. Thanksgiving is a part of the public worship of God.

It is His plan. This answer is quite conclusive. Private thanksgiving is not enough. It must be public. Some say there should be no public Sabbath. They say we ought to live every day as a Sabbath. Is it from any glory to God? No, it is to do away with the Sabbath. Some will say this is the ceremonial Law, and what have we to do with it? It waxeth old. Take care it is the mere symbol that is part away true. There is no offering of sacrifices because He offered Himself once for all. Noah, after leaving the ark, gave a public thanksgiving to God for his preservation. His sacrifice was submatal of Christ's sacrifice which indeed appeared in the cloud. We see it is a part of the public worship of God.

2. That thanksgiving is due to God for all His mercies.

Prayer is a confession of our sins and thankfulness of His mercies. Some people's wealth comes all made of oppression. What they ought to have given to God's cause is kept to witness against them. Injustice ought to be engraved on their tombstone! If God claimed your heart or mine, is it not His own? And where He asks your substance or mine, is it not His own? When He sends sinners to Hell, is He not just? And when He acquits His own people, is He not righteous in all His ways because Christ paid the price? Although we have lost all power of obeying God, that does not take away God's claim.

3. The nature of thanksgiving.

If we mistake the nature, that is sad, for God may claim one thing and we may give another. We ought to know what it is. First, it arises from a true sense of our unworthiness, that we do not deserve it. What we deserve we will not thank a man for. Israel knew, owing to their former idolatry, that they did not deserve this deliverance to His own house and worship. Second, we are assured in our minds that we cannot pay God. It is a breathing of gratitude to the person who paid the price which we cannot pay. Paul said, "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!" And what could any person give to God for His own Son but true thanks and gratitude? Third, it arises from a state of reconciliation with God. If not reconciled to God, he cannot be thankful. It is impossible. It is a Christian indeed that has the heart to be thankful. Fourth, it is a part of the Spirit of God and if we have not the Spirit it is impossible to be thankful in prayer to God. It is not so easily obtained as many think. It is indeed easy for the followers of the Saviour.

4. The way this duty ought to be discharged.

What is the way? It is to be discharged on our knees at the throne of grace. It is from the seat of prayer we obtain mercies, and it is by prayer they must be acknowledged, and for the sake of Him that sitteth upon the throne He will accept it. The man that never thanks God is an object of pity and this congregation ought to pray for such. If God claimed from you or me anything for His cause and we not give it, it will be a black shame. If God's ordinances were out of the world, His church and His name, God will then set fire to the world. "Ye are My friends if you do whatsoever I command you." Support the poor of God. What shall I say to the man that never inquires for the poor of God? It will be dreadful to hear Him who sitteth upon the throne say, "I was a hungered and ye gave me no meat," and so on; "inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of one of these, my brethren, you did it not to me."

Conclusion

To observe the Lord's hand in every mercy is a bounden duty. After many days ye shall reap the benefit of lending to the Lord. Many give their young days to the devil, and their old age and diseases to God. Will God accept such? Yes, He says at the eleventh hour He will receive them graciously and love them freely.